

Stomach Flu

by Dr. Kitty Ferguson

"Stomach flu", gastroenteritis, vomiting and diarrhea. Whatever you call it, it's no fun for anyone involved. It is inflammation of the lining of the stomach and intestines and is usually caused by a virus. It usually comes on suddenly with the worst part lasting 12 to 48 hours followed by milder diarrhea lasting up to 10 days. Common stomach flu will go away by itself.

Gastroenteritis usually begins with vomiting and fever followed shortly by the diarrhea. The stools are frequent, forceful, watery, foul-smelling and usually green. They are often accompanied by crampy pain. If there is blood or pus in the stool, if the fever is very high, or if the child just seems too sick, check with your doctor.

The problem is preventing dehydration. Dehydration is the loss of more fluid than the person is taking in. Usually for dehydration to occur there must be loss of water in the diarrhea stools plus vomiting that prevents replacement of that lost fluid. It is possible to become dehydrated with either vomiting or diarrhea alone, though, if severe. When enough fluid is

lost from the body there is not enough in the system to circulate well and shock can occur.

There are many signs of dehydration to watch for: weight loss, dry mouth, absence of tears, urinating less than three times in 24 hours, sunken eyes or a sunken soft spot. Weakness, listlessness and irritability may be especially serious. If your child has any of these signs in combination you should call your doctor.

The first goal of treatment is to get enough fluids in the child. We do that by not giving them anything---for a while. Putting 4 ounces of anything into a stomach that has just vomited is asking to get it right back. Wait two hours without giving anything at all. Then give very small amounts of a soothing cold liquid frequently. I often recommend the plan outlined below for uncomplicated vomiting. As the child gets better, slowly increase the amount given and give it less often.

Because the infection attacks the lining of the intestines they are not able to digest many foods. If these foods are eaten they become acids that damage the lining even more. (This same acid is what causes that burn-like

diaper rash babies with diarrhea get.) In order to let the intestines heal we need to not put anything in them that is hard to digest. This means clear liquids at first and then simple starches after things start to slow down, usually 24 to 48 hours. Milk should wait several days. The important thing about treating diarrhea is not to be in any hurry.

It is very important not to give medications for vomiting and diarrhea to your child unless they have been prescribed especially for him. Many of these medications will hide important symptoms and can even be dangerous for young children. In general these medications really don't help the child get well any faster anyway but just hide the symptoms. The diet changes are the best thing you can do to help the intestine heal. For older children for whom the urgency of diarrhea is a problem, Kaopectate is a safe addition to treatment.

Finally, gastroenteritis is a contagious disease. Careful handwashing will help a lot to stop the spread of the infection through the house. A child with stomach flu should not go to school or be around others until he is getting better.



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returned to Provo and worked a while before attending the BYU and received her T.R.T. (Technical Recreational Therapy.) She worked at the Utah Valley Care Center as a T.R.T. for one and one half years and received her license as a Social Service Aid at the Ut. Valley Care Center, which was then owned by Care Enterprises, the company which owns the Heber Valley facility. While she was doing all of this, she went to Utah Tech. College in Provo and received her degree as Practical Nurse.

While living in Provo, Kathleen met Scot Matthew Ellison and they became good friends before he left for his mission in Spain-Madrid. He came home

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